



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXXII

SEPTEMBER, 1908

NUMBER 3

Editorial

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

THE PREVALENCE OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD AND ITS RESULTS

The spirit and attitude toward Old Testament interpretation, now so universally associated with the name Wellhausen, have come to characterize practically all Old Testament scholars. Some are possessed by them in greater degree than others, but even those most closely adhering to former methods of exegesis have not escaped the influence of the movement. The defense of traditional positions contributed by Professor Orr, for example, differs fundamentally from that represented by Professor William Henry Green, in the last generation. The success of the critico-historical method seems to be so firmly assured that we might well fear lest it become a new orthodoxy and develop a new dogmatism. The hour of triumph is not infrequently the hour of greatest danger.

THE PAN-BABYLONIAN DEFECTION

Signs are not wanting, however, that the movement is not to be allowed to rest upon its laurels. A period of introspection, or self-criticism, has set in. Released from the necessity of defending themselves from outside attack, the representatives of the new Old Testament learning have begun to examine more critically the strength of the positions they occupy. One result is the so-called Pan-Babylonian school of criticism, which was so ably described and criticized by Professor Barton in the May number of the *Biblical World*. Briefly stated, its contention is that the Wellhausen school

has overlooked, or underestimated, the fact that the Hebrews lived in the midst of a great oriental civilization, the main ideas and institutions of which they must have shared. Consequently, they are to be given credit for greater attainment, intellectually, socially, and religiously, in the early years of their existence than is commonly conceded them by modern criticism. The results reached upon this basis, on the one hand, accord more nearly with the traditional view in that they tend to establish the existence of monotheism in pre-prophetic Israel; but, on the other, they depart from long-accepted views more radically in that they tend to show that Israel's religious possession was not hers alone but was shared by the whole oriental world.

THE MOST RECENT ATTACK UPON THE HISTORICAL METHOD

A second result is the series of Old Testament studies recently inaugurated by Professor Eerdmans, of the University of Leiden, and directed, as he himself declares, against the position of the Wellhausen school in general, and, in particular, against its view of the origin of the sources that constitute the basis of the early Old Testament literature. The first instalment of these studies concerns itself with an investigation of the prevailing documentary hypothesis as applied to the book of Genesis. The conclusions of this investigation are sufficiently startling. The J, E, and P documents, to which we have long since become reconciled, are ruled out of court. In their stead appear as the ultimate sources of Genesis four strata of sagas or legends. To the first and oldest stratum belong a few stories reflecting an undimmed primitive polytheism. A second stratum recognizes Jehovah as one among many gods. The third carries over polytheistic elements from tradition to Jehovah, the only God. The fourth consists of supplementary additions from a late period when monotheism had triumphed and all the old sagas were interpreted monotheistically. The stages of the process by which these four strata of sagas grew into the present book of Genesis were, in brief, as follows: The foundation of the book was laid in the form of a large collection of sagas, made up chiefly of the stories of the patriarchs and their families beginning with Adam, to which the name *Book of Adam* is applied. This supposititious book took form

not later than 700 B. C., since it has no trace of monotheistic teaching; it constitutes the larger part of the book of Genesis. The first addition to this nucleus was a series of stories to be known as the Israel-recension, in distinction from the Jacob-recension which constitutes part of the *Book of Adam*. The Israel-recension does not differ essentially in ideas or date from the *Book of Adam*. To this combined work, there was next attached a series of stories edited from a monotheistic point of view and so to be dated in some period after the appearance of Deuteronomy. Just how many more times the work was expanded cannot be determined.

It is unnecessary to point out how vastly different this alignment of sources is from that now current. It is practically a return to the old fragment hypothesis of the early days of Hexateuchal analysis. It may also be noted how wide a difference in the conception of Israel's religious development exists between the position assumed by Eerdmans and that taken by the representatives of the Pan-Babylonian school. By the latter, monotheism is assigned to the period of Moses; by Eerdmans, to the period of Jeremiah and the Exile. Which is the nearer right, cannot perhaps yet be determined. Time will tell.

THE TRANSITORY ELEMENT IN HISTORICAL CRITICISM

It should be remembered that Eerdmans, occupant of the chair formerly held by Kuenen, and the Pan-Babylonists are all alike members of the school of Wellhausen, having not the slightest intention of reinstating the old orthodoxy. Is Wellhausenism, therefore, to be described as a house divided against itself? And are we consequently to expect its speedy downfall? That depends, partly, at least upon our definition of Wellhausenism. If we identify it with the commonly accepted results of modern Old Testament criticism, we must of course acknowledge that these results, like any given set of supposed facts and opinions, must be modified in the course of time as new facts are discovered and as old facts are seen in new light. It is conceivable, indeed, that the modification may be so great as to render the original product practically unrecognizable. Such would be the case were Eerdmans' views, for example, to become generally accepted.

THE PERMANENT CONTRIBUTION

But the contribution of modern, historical criticism is not to be sought primarily in the results it has wrought out. It consists rather in its scientific method and spirit. These constitute a permanent gain for biblical interpretation. The necessity of applying every rational test and of facing all the facts squarely without theological let or hindrance can never again be successfully called in question in the realm of biblical scholarship. This fact is already so thoroughly recognized that even the opponents of historical criticism are constrained to acknowledge the legitimacy of its method and to employ that method in their attacks upon its positions. No interpretation of biblical life and thought can secure a moment's hearing unless it be based upon recognized scientific method. One interpretation of the biblical history may give place to another throughout the centuries, but the historical method and spirit must abide.

This historical method is the most precious possession of the interpreter as such. Rigid adherence to it is the only, but all-sufficient, guarantee against that intellectual paralysis which inevitably ends in unspiritual and unscientific dogmatism. It functions as a perpetual fountain of the waters of life, causing new growths to spring up in every direction and keeping alive and vigorous the desire to get at things as they are. It welcomes every trained student; it asks nothing of his religious or philosophical antecedents, but insists only upon an open mind. It asks no favors from those to whom it makes its appeal for acceptance. It desires only to be judged by the standards that apply in other sciences and rests its case upon its reasonableness. It follows from all this that changes must needs come in the formulation of results. New hypotheses will constantly appear. There can be no final statement, authoritative once for all. Stagnation is death; life ever manifests itself in new forms. The historical method belongs to the realm of life.